

Jury duty in Macomb is shortened during test run

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Macomb County Clerk-Register of Deeds Carmella Sabaugh's plan shortening most jury duty from one week to just one day was recently approved for a test run by Macomb County circuit court judges. The first pink jury summonses under the new plan were mailed last week. Those summoned for Macomb County circuit court jury duty in November and December will be dismissed after just one day if they are not picked for a jury trial. The new plan has no added cost to taxpayers. Juror pay will remain \$25 for the first day and \$40 for subsequent days.

"As a mother of five, I know how hard it is to give up an entire week when summoned for jury duty," said Sabaugh. "With a one-day/one-trial system, most people will miss only one day from work or away from their kids. This will be much better for our community." Under the current system, those summoned for jury duty must serve Tuesday through Friday. Most of a juror's time is idle. Although the average jury trial in Macomb County lasts four days, the odds of actually being picked for a jury trial are slim. Of the 12,392 people summoned for jury duty in 2004, only 1,663 served on a trial.

Sabaugh's office mails blue juror qualification questionnaires every year to Macomb County residents based on Secretary of State driver's licenses and Michigan identification cards. Voter registration records are not used for jury duty.

The questionnaires are returned to Sabaugh's office where a pool of qualified jurors is created. It is from this pool that jurors are sent pink jury summonses to serve on jury duty. A juror can be summoned for jury duty no more than once per year. Jurors 70 years and older may decline to serve. Each year a new list of potential jurors is created. In 2004, 12,392 people were sent summonses for jury duty, 7,220 people were brought in but only 1,663 actually served on a jury. In 2004, 17,250 circuit court cases were filed in the Macomb County Clerk's Office. Only 147 resulted in jury trials. There were 97 criminal case jury trials with an average trial length of 3.4 days and 50 civil case jury trials with an average trial length of 3.1 days. On average, 150 jurors serve daily.

According to Sabaugh's office, a person receiving a pink jury summons has only about a 13 percent chance of actually serving on a jury trial that lasts more than one day. Fourteen people comprise a criminal jury and eight people comprise a civil jury. More jurors must be summoned than the jury trial statistics represent because cases often settle at the last minute.

Sabaugh made other juror improvements last year. She started a program with the Suburban Mobile Authority for Regional Transport (SMART) providing free bus tickets to jurors. She also partnered with the Mount Clemens Public Library letting jurors request books on the Internet to be delivered to the jury room upon jurors' arrival. Both programs were done at no additional taxpayer cost.